



The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway

Edward Benton-Banai (Contributor)

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The Ojibway is one of the largest groups of Native Americans, belonging to the Anishinabe people of what is today the northern United States and Canada. *The Mishomis Book* documents the history, traditions, and culture of the Ojibway people through stories and myths passed down through generations. Written by Ojibway educator and spiritual leader Edward Benton-Banai, and first published in 1988, *The Mishomis Book* draws from the traditional teachings of tribal elders to instruct young readers about Ojibway creation stories and legends, the origin and importance of the Ojibway family structure and clan system, the Midewiwin religion, the construction and use of the water drum and sweat lodge, and modern Ojibway history.

Written for readers from all cultures-but especially for Ojibway and Native youth-*The Mishomis Book* provides an introduction to Ojibway culture and an understanding of the sacred Midewiwin teachings, aiming to protect this knowledge by instilling its importance in a new generation. Encouraging the preservation of a way of life that is centered on respect for all living things, these vibrant stories about life, self, community, and relationship to nature are just as relevant to the modern reader as they were hundreds of years ago.

The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway Details

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Patrice says

This book was an excellent and insightful look into ojibway history and culture, from the perspective of the ojibway people. I consider reading this to be an important learning experience that I feel has helped me get in touch with my culture.

Travis Hamilton says

A great introduction to the Ojibway People. The book gave me a much better foundation to start building my understanding of the Ojibway. It was a simple and quick read, that can play well for young adults and also for anyone who has a great understanding already. Very simple and yet I know there was more in the words on the pages that I could gain more from by another and another and another read through. I'm glad this book was introduced to me by a good Ojibway friend. I will read it again someday.

Jill says

"The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway," by Edward Benton-Banai is a beautifully illustrated children's book that translates hundreds of years of Native American oral tradition into a format that is accessible to just about anyone. Broken up into fifteen distinct chapters, the book recounts the creation of the universe, Earth, animals, and man while exploring the origins of Ojibway government, religion, and the importance of balance in nature and in human life. It is respectfully told from the perspective of a wise grandfather (Mishomis) and is interwoven with key vocabulary, explanations of cultural objects, and gentle context cues that recap main ideas from previous chapters. The book gently instructs and welcomes all who wish to hear the tales.

Mishomis is clear from the start that he is "preparing this place [the contemporary world] to be a place of rebirth for traditional Indian ways" (1) and that "together, we can begin the journey back to find what many of our people left by the trail" (2). Readers later come to discover that Ojibway prophets hundreds of years ago foretold of the arrival of a "Light-skinned Race," a subsequent military attack on Indian people "aimed at taking away their land and their independence as a free and sovereign people" (91), and a time when a New People would emerge and "retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail" (93). The author is clearly one of the New People, devoted to teaching the young and dedicated to the hope for a future that is respectful of nature, one that allows for the strengthening of traditional Native American culture and values. One of the traditional values that is frequently highlighted is the importance of mutual respect between a man and a woman. Mother Earth is a woman who is to be protected and treated with respect by Original Man. Additionally, "the power to change the Creation should lie only in the hands of Mother Earth and the Creator" (55). When Original Man finds his mate, he learns that "The most important thing that bound Anishinabe and the Firekeeper's Daughter was the feeling of ma-na'-ji-win' (respect) that they shared between them. This foundation of respect was to be very important to guide future unions between men and women" (22). When men and women started to lose that respect for one another, a flood (reminiscent of the Epic of Gilgamesh or Noah's Arc) was sent to purify the Earth. After the flood, the spirit of Original Man learns that the moon is a woman, the counterpart to the Sun (a man). "Alone, man is backwards and

undeveloped. He needs the light that woman gives to make him whole" (37). The idea of the importance of mutual respect between a man and woman is again described in the form of a solar eclipse, "to remind all women and men of their responsibility to each other even in the midst of all their earthly tasks" (39). Seeing how important this idea of mutual respect is, I am even more saddened by the way that Native American social structures and gender roles were disrupted with the advent of colonization.

Three symbols from the text jumped out at me. I was first struck by the characterization of the whirlwind, whose job is to help keep humans from trying too hard to find fulfillment in life. "My purpose is to tease those who take themselves too seriously" (54). I am reminded of how easy it is for humans to feel overwhelmed, as if we're spinning in a whirlwind. In the words of Mishomis, "If we try too hard to make the right decisions in life we might miss important signs that could lead us to the proper fork in life's path" (54). The second symbol was that of a choice between "two roads," possibly "the road to technology and road to spiritualism" that would need to be chosen by the Light-skinned Race (93). The correct road would light "an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood" and the wrong road would "cause death to all the Earth's people" (93). This chapter certainly places a great deal of responsibility upon people outside of the Ojibway tribe. I understand the reasons for that, but it leaves me feeling more than a little worried.

The third symbol was that of the buffalo, "guardian to Indian people everywhere" (112), left standing on only one foot, "striving as best he can so that Indian people might have a future in this world (113).

Mishomis' sincere invitation to readers, Native American children in particular, to help support the Buffalo in his efforts to stand on all four legs reminded me of how important future generations (Ojibway or not) are to the future of this story.

Lynda Waltien says

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This book portrayed beliefs, customs, celebrations and traditions of the Ojibway people. It was done in a graphic style which added to the ethereal and spiritual tones. The ancient knowledge recorded in this book is fascinating and meshes well with other books I have read about the Ojibway. In many years of teaching Native American culture I have noticed that the Ojibway seem to have to most published writing of ancient legends. This book is arranged from creation tales to the present. Specific key beliefs are highlighted (p.64) which made this a wonderful book to copy sections to add to my Native American study.

The Mishomis Book was the most helpful book for me in this collection in terms of teaching to students. I loved the graphic style and taught students to replicate that when writing facts in their theme journal. We created an Ojibway glossary which students decorated with pen and ink sketches and had laminated. I loved how the origin of items such as the water drum, braided sweet grass and cedar were explained. Students quickly picked up comparisons to the Bible and the Koran. We had good discussions about how the concepts described in this book have been thought about and written about in every culture. This book was also great for creating Venn diagrams to compare renditions of Waynaboozhoo with other tales we had collected. Iroquois legends also talk of a similar figure called Nanaboozhoo. The chapters entitled The First Midewiwin Society and The Sweat Lodge were the best explanations of healing ceremonies that I have read.

Jennifer Weiland says

This book is well written and quite informative. It combines creativity and cultural tradition all in one. I was happy that it included some Ojibway in it, as in the language, and did my best to try to pronounce them. I love the artwork as well, the entire book is quite well put together. It was intriguing to learn more about

Ojibway culture and their beliefs. I recommend if anyone can get their hands on this book, it might be difficult to find, that they do read it. Though do keep in mind that there are many different Creation stories among the Indigenous people [as there are a vast variety of different Indigenous cultures] and even among Ojibway clans and tribes the stories might differ a little. This book perfectly amalgamates the traditional Ojibway of oral story telling, and also including ways in which to carry ones self, to act with each other, and how to treat nature, which so heavily is ingrained within Ojibway teachings.

Jennifer says

This was given to me by a student at the Community and Tribal College I work at. This book does a great job of explaining Native(focus on Ojibwe) customs, beliefs, and history.

Ellen Harrington-kane says

I loved this so much, I just had to color it :)

What is so incredible to me are the shared myths of different belief systems. What I most appreciate about the Ojibwe belief system is that it seems, well, less violent than the Christian faith. As a person who believes in the symbolism of the world around us, I enjoyed learning more about the symbolism of the Ojibwe.

Jade Wilson says

This book is very informational. This book shares traditions, culture, and journeys of the Ojibwe people. There are detailed illustrations along with this book. Mishomis means Grandfather. This book would be useful in bringing diversity to an elementary classroom. The students would learn about the Ojibwe people and the cultural background, traditions, and history of the Ojibwe people.

Sara says

Need to buy this one. Good for Patrick! Folk tales of the Ojibwe.

Sherri Anderson says

The legends of the Ojibwe are very interesting.
